

## Delta Independent Science Board

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December 8, 2016

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To: Organizers of the Bay-Delta Science Conference of 2016

From: Delta Independent Science Board

Subject: Accolades, Suggestions, and Further Comments on the 2016 Conference

The organizers of the 2016 Bay-Delta Science Conference are commended for orchestrating another outstanding conference. The plenaries, regular sessions and platform talks, and posters did much to advance science in the Bay-Delta region and its growing relevance to issues of statewide and regional importance.

Most Board members were on hand for at least one of the three days, and half were there for the entire conference. Some attended the Delta Stewardship Council meeting, conveniently co-located on Thursday. We discussed the conference during our November public meeting.

Participation in the Bay-Delta Science Conference has become an essential activity for scientists, engineers, and policymakers working on the Delta, downstream, and upstream. The Conference strengthens the scientific credibility and effectiveness of all involved in Delta issues. It brings out the best for presentations and formal and informal discussions. It rivals major national and international meetings in scientific quality, while being more relevant, and far less expensive for most attendees. Its size, duration, and topical mix promote scientific communication and collaboration.

The community of scientists and technical people working on the Delta's problems benefits immensely from the Bay-Delta Science Conference, particularly in engaging and the opportunities to interact with students and postdocs. The Delta Science Fellows networking/mentoring lunch and Student/Early Career Scientist Mentor Lunch are two specific examples of how this conference exposes young people to potential agency service and opportunities for advancement.

We commend the meeting organizers for putting together a strong program of the appropriate size and scope for the Bay-Delta science community. Unlike many other large professional meetings, the topics seemed to be arranged to minimize overlap, making it easier to decide what sessions to attend. The venue and meeting structure also provided time for interaction during the breaks, lunch and poster sessions. The raffle at the end is always nicely effective at keeping folks around to the last session on the last day.

This year's Conference surpassed its predecessors in the overall quality of its plenary session, and in analysis and scientific synthesis provided in topical sessions. A particularly important innovation was the session that paired State of Bay-Delta Science chapter authors with policy-makers, in well-moderated discussions of the value and difficulty of applying science to policy. Another new addition

was a session on “Delta as Place.” Evening poster sessions, well-attended by authors and their visitors, occasioned discussions over food and drink. Daytime poster sessions in the upstairs coffee area were useful where authors were present. Visual arts further enriched the program.

Suggestions for future conferences include:

*More science-policy discussions.* The session where prominent scientists talked publicly with policy-makers generally and on specific areas of science was broadly seen as the most exciting innovation of this year’s conference. Hats off to Darcy Austin for organizing this session, and to Randy Fiorini for asking probing questions. It would be good to repeat and perhaps expand on this format in the future. Perhaps adding such a one-on-one discussion at the end of major scientific sessions would be valuable. Also, such scientist-policy-maker discussions might be useful for some regular agency public meetings – almost a scientific half-time.

*Statements of broader impacts.* As recommended in the past, all presenters could be encouraged to state, both in abstracts and in presentations, what the new findings imply for issues of public importance as a requirement to provide a statement of the broader implications of the work. Several Delta ISB members observed that the better abstracts tended to begin with the major contributions and insights of the work. Better writing should always be encouraged.

*Additional guides to poster session.* Sheets posted in the downstairs poster hall, as lists made available online, could tabulate posters alphabetically by author, as well in numerical sequence, for ease of locating posters of interest.

*Encourage more talks aimed at the conference theme.* While the conference talks were generally in the thematic area and of high quality, in the future contributors can be encouraged to align their presentations to highlight the theme better.

We are confident that the conference committee will continue to provide the excellent conference experience in 2018 for the benefit of science, policymakers, and public interests in the Bay-Delta.